Play It Again

kidbrothers.net/release/marapr95.html

My grandparents all repeated themselves a lot. Every ten minutes or so their conversations would circle and start again, word for word. As they got older an ever broadening range of suggestions became cues for an ever narrowing range of responses: "Yes, well, did I ever tell you about that big storm we had in '39? ...Do you have your driver's license already? ...When did you graduate from high school? ...Why is it you haven't married yet? ...We had a whopper rain back in...."

So, you can probably imagine how disturbing it was to me when, after writing a column for this issue of RELEASE - after sprucing and polishing it to a fine shine and faxing it - I realized that it was a nearly exact duplicate of an article I wrote back in '93, just before "that big storm" I probably mentioned already (or have I?). Anyway, suddenly everything I thought about saying sounded weirdly like the echo of what I had already said. This, of course, would not be so worrisome to a person with a quieter disposition or even to someone who had any gift other than the "gift of gab." And, granted, imitation is a form of flattery, but that's only true if someone else is imitating you. If you imitate yourself, you just sound conceited. Or old.

Now, I am not so naive as to imagine that people have not spotted some conceit in me. I know it's there and that I am not humble enough to extinguish it or clever enough to disguise it. A person can overcome conceit though, through prayer and service and devotion. But no amount of fasting or Bible memorizing or church attending will hold sway over aging. If we live long enough, we will get old. And as we get older we will more and more repeat ourselves, as I have already begun to do. Repeatedly.

Not that I am a card-carrying member of the youth cult. I was awful at being young. My adolescence was riddled with that angst-ridden morbidity that seethes with crushes, complexes and bad poetry. The "twenties" were the March of my life - in like a lion, out like a lamb. They were predictably turbulent early on and dissolved into quiet desperation just before passing. At 30 I was relieved of the responsibility to be "young and foolish" - I was not yet old and I was not still young. And God, who is good through all

ages, had landed me at last in a place of relative peace and even prosperity.

Of course, just as I wasted my youth by being too goofy, I blemished the high noon of my life by becoming a bit (this is so embarrassing), conceited. It's normal, I guess, but embarrassing nonetheless. And so, God, being good still, is doing what He does, doing what I can't do and undoing what I have done.

God lets us struggle and lets us prosper - we don't all struggle and prosper the same, but we all do both to some degree. And when we have done enough to think more highly of ourselves than we should, God lets us age. And as we age we begin to forget stuff, our joints stiffen, our heads go a little soft. We drive slower and are less driven; are more embarrassed but less likely to die of that embarrassment and more likely to die of natural causes. Getting old is part of getting past whatever illusion we have about ourselves. It is part of getting free - free from reasonable doubts, irrational conceits, false securities, displaced affections...

And so, let me grow. Let me grow old. Let me grow free. Even if I have to repeat myself to do it.

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